

## Philosophy En Route to Reality: A Bumpy Ride

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*My intellectual journey in philosophy proceeded along two mountainous paths that coincided at their base, but forked less than halfway up the incline. The first is that of my philosophical development, a steep but steady and continuous ascent. It began in my family, and accelerated in high school, art school, college, and graduate school. Those foundations propelled my philosophical research into the nature of rationality and its relation to the structure of the self, a long-term project focused on the Kantian and Humean metaethical traditions in Anglo-American analytic philosophy. It would have been impossible to bring this project to completion without the anchor, compass, and conceptual mapping provided by my prior, longstanding involvement in the practice and theory of Vedic philosophy. The second path is that of my professional route through the field of academic philosophy, which branched onto a rocky detour in graduate school, followed by a short but steep ascent, followed next by a much steeper, sustained descent off that road, into the ravine, down in flames, and out of the profession. In order to reach the summit of the first path, I had to reach the nadir of the second. It was the right decision. My yoga practice cushioned my landing.*

**Keywords:** Yoga; Vedānta; Sāṃkhya; Vedic philosophy; Spinoza; LSD; art; Kant; Hume; behaviorism; Rawls; metaethics; decision theory; Humean; Kantian



My parents in Socratic dialogue, 1940s

My love of analytic philosophy is an inherited trait. My father was a lawyer and lawyer's son whose Jesuit college training found expression in metaphysical speculation and dialectical arguments with me. My mother's sharp analytical sensibility habitually surfaced in ironical replies to my incessant questions. "Does there have to be a reason for everything?" she parried to one of them. "Yes!" I insisted vehemently. "Then go ask your father what it is!" she retorted. And, true to form, he provided one, a Prime Mover-style reason for everything. Exasperated, she protested, "But the child wants a reason for *each* thing!" And so it went between the three of us.

For grammar school and high school I went to New Lincoln, a private progressive prep school in New York City. My eleventh grade homeroom teacher, Mr. Beiser, also taught philosophy. He assigned us Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*, Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*, and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, which we were also studying in French in our French language class. I felt completely at home in this course. I loved the level of abstraction at which the class discussions took

place, the dialectical structure of those discussions, and the ideas and habits of reasoning. All were comfortable and familiar from my home environment. Spinoza was my favorite, an easy transition from my father's inventive reasons for everything—just as my persistent questions and

arguments in that class were an easy transition from my favored mode of interaction with both of my parents.

New Lincoln was also the site of my first exposure to Indian philosophy, but not in the classroom. New Lincoln students actively participated in the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s. While my father was donating pro bono legal counsel to Martin Luther King, we were involved in organizing anti-discrimination protests in Manhattan. A classmate founded the New Lincoln chapter of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) in 1963. With the full support of New Lincoln's teaching staff, an organizer was invited to speak to us about the principles and tactics of nonviolent resistance that Bayard Rustin had brought back with him from his sojourn in India with Mahatma Gandhi. The principles were derived from the foundational Vedic texts of Yoga, Vedānta, Sāṃkhya—the *Upaniṣads*, *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā*, *Bhagavad Gīta*, *Brahma Sūtra*, and, of particular importance for Gandhi's own acts of nonviolent political resistance, the *Yoga Sūtra*. The ultimate purpose of these texts is to spiritually prepare the yoga practitioner for the encounter with death, and effective nonviolent protest demands this preparation. Rustin and King disseminated those principles among their activist followers of that period, and we absorbed them in discussion, meditation, and some elementary hatha yoga exercises—even though we put them to use only in protest marches in the streets of Manhattan and Washington, D.C., rather than in voter registration drives in Alabama. None of our parents would have permitted the trip south. Getting mine to allow me to participate in the 1963 March on Washington was not easy, either.

In early 1965, during my junior year in high school, I took LSD six times over a period of roughly six months—uptown with a Puerto Rican spiritual medium who used it to conduct séances, and downtown with an Irish colleague of Timothy Leary's who conducted group meditation to investigate altered states of consciousness. Like the Beat Poets I meant to emulate, I regarded this experimentation as *pro forma* for my artistic training. Spinoza had provided my first template for interpreting those experiences. But the *Upaniṣads*, *Gīta*, and later commentaries in the Advaita Vedantic tradition deepened my comprehension of what Spinoza had been referring to.

The truths I found in those texts illuminated and contextualized those I had just experienced. These were clearly experiences of a pre-existing objective reality rather than a transient, subjective hallucination; the real always finds a way to make its presence felt, if one is paying attention. With time and patience, it also can be accessed through certain regular yogic practices. For purposes of this discussion, the primary benefit of this experience is that it conclusively demonstrates the falsity of Cartesian solipsism, Empiricist skepticism, and of Kant's account of noumena as merely a limiting concept. But even if I had had any doubts about its veracity, those texts would have immediately dispelled them. They cemented the commitment to yoga that had begun with my participation in the Civil Rights Movement, and launched my lifelong yoga practice. That practice includes the physical postures as only one of the many components of an integrated yogic lifestyle. Others include meditation, diet, and the cultivation of particular dispositions of mind and action, as well as study of the texts.

My approach to those texts has always been practical rather than scholarly. I study them for their impact on my life, and on my understanding of life, rather than as objects of academic research. Regardless of the many differences among them, they all converge on certain basic insights that western science, belatedly, has enabled us to acknowledge as truistic: that empirical reality is illusory, that sensory satisfaction is transitory and unreliable, that intellection disposes us to self-deception, and that true freedom consists in extricating oneself from the compulsions and limitations of the ego. The Vedic texts recommend certain basic practices as antidotes: meditation, self-reflection, the study of enlightened texts, and various personal habits that build autonomy. The purpose of all of these practices is to gradually habituate the practitioner to a state of awareness in which the delusions and obsessions of the ego can be safely put aside, and reality in itself apprehended on its own terms.

The aim of my yoga practice is to sharpen and clarify my perception of that reality; to reinforce my ability to embrace all of it, including my own faults, flubs, misfortunes, and death, without flinching or self-deception; and to exercise and strengthen the habits of nonviolent resistance to all of the attempts I encounter to suppress, obscure, or dissimulate that reality. That is what these texts are for, and that is the way they function in my life. Scholarly treatments of them confined exclusively to textual exegeses and analyses of the theories they propound do not compel my interest, because they do not exhibit the requisite practical insight into the esoteric epistemic states on which the texts themselves are based.

I view my attachment to Indian philosophy as also, at least in part, an inherited trait. It is probably the legacy of my Indian maternal second great grandmother, a Hindu from Chittagong, East Bengal (now Bangladesh) who eloped with my maternal second great grandfather, an English military officer of the British Raj, to Jamaica, where they owned a slave plantation. My mother's family, none of whom are philosophers to my knowledge, and all of whom were baptized in the Catholic church, evinced an unusual receptivity to the principles discussed in the *Gita*. Several of my maternal relatives turned to me, during my teenage years and after, to help them confront their mortality when the time came. The *Gita* was a frequent focus of our talks. My mother and I read it together daily during the two years before she died of emphysema. Those unflinching deathbed conversations helped anchor me in the reality of the immanent death of the body and the ego, and deepened my appreciation of the texts I was now studying in earnest.

My LSD experiences and readings in Vedic philosophy influenced a series of art works I produced between 1968 and 1970, about which I wrote an essay ("Hypothesis"<sup>1</sup>) arguing that space and time were forms of perception. Upon reading it, my friend Phillip Zohn, who was doing graduate work in analytic philosophy at the City University of New York (CUNY), strongly recommended that I read the Transcendental Aesthetic of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. I did, and was immediately hooked. Kant had articulated in systematic and analytic form many of the same deep truths I had found and was continuing to explore in the Vedic texts. Reading the first *Critique* showed me that I had to study philosophy seriously. But I was also getting that message from many of my fellow artists. In the art world at that time, Jasper Johns's interest in Wittgenstein had put analytic philosophy on the map, and those of us who were making Conceptual art were also reading Quine, Strawson, Ayer, Austin, Russell, and Ryle, among others. I felt a need to read all of these authors systematically rather than haphazardly. What I really needed was a course syllabus in the philosophy of language.

After high school, I had opted for art school over college, in part because my family ties had predestined me for Vassar, which at that time did not have a significant studio art major. But now I was guided by a different set of interests to reconsider a college education. I had left home during my first year at the School of Visual Arts (SVA), and stopped attending classes there by the end of my second year, while taking summer courses in philosophy at the City College of New York (CCNY). I was living in my own loft on the Lower East Side. To support myself and fund my artmaking, I was working as a receptionist, telephone operator, model, and bookkeeper. During those years, CCNY was free and open to those students who passed its entrance exam. Bertrand Russell had taught there and my mother worked there. At my request, she sent me the catalogue of course offerings—the menu of a feast for the hungry mind. I feverishly drew up a four-year course of study that included four simultaneous majors: philosophy, physics, history, and musicology. In time I pared them down to a philosophy major and a musicology minor. My academic guidance counselor advised me that I could narrow the list even further with transfer credits for some of my coursework at SVA. I declined. I took virtually every course in the philosophy department.

My instructor for Introduction to Philosophy was Maurice Cohen, who justified his decision to begin the ancient philosophy segment with the *Gita* before moving along to the Pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle, by describing himself as a "rugged individualist." That was an apt

description: It did, indeed, take a rebel's soul to list that text in a course syllabus in a department as pervasively analytic as that one. But it demonstrated to me that the connections were there, could be taught and discussed, and could be integrated successfully into an Anglo-American analytic curriculum.

By that time my yoga practice was an established part of my life. To practice it and simultaneously study it in a classroom enhanced that practice enormously, and cemented its centrality in my life. That was my first exposure to *jñāna yoga*, the yoga of analysis and scholarship. That discipline is not only fully compatible with the techniques and methods of reasoning of analytic philosophy; it is an application of them. Orthodox Vedic philosophy is rationalistic in orientation and outlook, so these two traditions in fact fit together quite nicely.<sup>2</sup> It is only the revelational parts that explore the regions of the self beyond the ego that make Anglo-American analytic philosophers nervous. So although I quickly got the message from my other professors that Vedic philosophy was off-limits in my academic studies, that did not stop me from drawing on it in my work.

I found these resources particularly useful in approaching Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Like Spinoza and the Vedic authors, Kant is a Gestalt, big-picture thinker. Unlike most of the Vedic seers (the *Rishis*), Kant's intellectual sensibility inclines him to detailed, systematic linear exposition. The problem is that no matter where you first step into his system, you are lost—just as you would be in an unfamiliar landscape after the helicopter that dropped you there had departed. Just as we cannot develop a mental map of a new geographic terrain without traversing it several times and noting where physical markers stand in relation to one another, we similarly cannot develop a conceptual map of Kant's philosophical terrain without rereading the book several times and remembering where the key concepts stand in relation to one another: for example, that of the transcendental unity of apperception in relation to the empirical self, or to the "I," or to the ideas of reason, or to the concept of causality, or to the intelligible world. Later, I found it useful to remind students in my Kant seminars that they should expect to have to read the entire book cover to cover at least ten times before the feeling of having caught their heads in the spin cycle of a washing machine would begin to subside.

I have read that book many more times than that, and that feeling still has not entirely subsided. But I began with a distinct advantage: I recognized the general lay of the land from my prior exposure to Vedic philosophy, itself facilitated by my first exposure to Spinoza; and so did not suffer the same degree of confusion and disorientation as do many first-time readers of the *Critique*. Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism is so similar to Śaṅkara's concept of *māya* that there is even significant correspondence between their respective technical terminologies. His concept of the original synthetic unity of apperception bears close comparison to the Samkhyan and Yogic concepts of *puruṣa*. And the ethical deontologism of his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* expresses an eighteenth-century Enlightenment approach to the doctrine of *vairāgya* articulated in the *Bhagavad Gita*. So reading Kant's texts for the first time was a uniquely pleasurable experience, imbricated with that same shock of recognition I had felt with my first exposure to Spinoza. I took to Kant like a duck to water. I felt sure I understood exactly what he was trying to say.

I spent the summer of 1971 doing yoga, fasting, and writing a 56-page term paper entitled, "Appearance: A Reconstruction of Kant's Model of Experience," for a graduate seminar I had taken with Professor Michael Levin. About this paper, he commented on the frontispiece, "It is with mental powers failing, prey to exhaustion, that I say that this is a good, if overlong, paper. It shows thorough mastery of the KRV, even if you sometimes twist things a little. Often I found it hard to see just where you disagreed with your opponents." This course was one of a few that my undergraduate professors taught for their graduate students at CUNY that they permitted me to take for credit. As I performed well and felt comfortable in all of those courses, they naturally assumed, correctly, that I wanted more.

By the time I finished my undergraduate degree, summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, and with Research Honors in Philosophy, I had been long since tracked for graduate school. No one ever asked me whether I had thought of going to graduate school, or tried to convince me that I should. They simply began to remind me at a certain point to take the Graduate Record Exams (GREs), to discuss with me the advantages and disadvantages of various graduate programs, to counsel me about how to prepare a dossier, and to comment on the suitability of various term papers for inclusion in that dossier. None of us ever questioned whether this was the right direction for me. We all knew it was.<sup>3</sup>

And no one ever suggested that I should, or would have to, give up my work as an artist in order to pursue this interest. The predilection of the art world at that time for analytic philosophy and Conceptual art made graduate school in philosophy not only thinkable but also acceptable. While studying philosophy in graduate school at Harvard, I continued to produce my artwork and exhibit it in New York and elsewhere. During my time living in Cambridge, right around the corner from the philosophy department, I never thought to mention my work as an artist, or even that I was an artist, because it was irrelevant to my daily preoccupations: taking philosophy courses, conceptualizing my dissertation, and immersing myself in the culture of academia. My graduate professors didn't care what I did with my free time, as long as I excelled at my work. Only once did a Harvard professor indicate that he even knew about that part of my life. I had not taken a course with Professor Nelson Goodman because my philosophical interests were unrelated to art or aesthetics. But one day he stopped me in Emerson Hall and exclaimed, "I didn't know you were *that* Adrian Piper! You have a double life!" I confessed that I was, and did, and asked him to please keep it a secret. To my knowledge, he did.

That term paper on Kant I had written as an undergraduate had so completely exhausted my mental powers that I had been unable to even look at the first *Critique* for several years afterward. On the one hand, it drew me so deeply into the text that I often felt I was losing my sense of self. On the other, it restructured the neurological pathways of my brain to accommodate Kant's conceptual mapping of the relation between subject, object, and reality. Following by only a few years on the heels of my discovery of Vedic philosophy, this was quite a lot of neural reorganization to undergo. I needed a rest. During those Kant-free years, I explored the other branches of analytic philosophy through my course work at CCNY, CUNY, and Harvard. Philosophy of science, modal logic, philosophy of mind, and epistemology were among my favorites. Professor Martin Tamny's philosophy of science course had awakened my interest in nomological explanation, which led him to recommend Hughes & Cresswell's *Introduction to Modal Logic*.<sup>4</sup> He described my term paper on the topic as containing an original result, but advised against including it in my graduate school dossier because modal logic was too controversial in some circles. I learned only later that Harvard was one of them. And a good thing, too, for my admiration for the majesty and ambition of John Rawls's project in *A Theory of Justice*, of anchoring a substantive social contract theory in value-neutral methodological principles already established in the social sciences, was unbounded.<sup>5</sup> I knew that this was the way I wanted to do philosophy.

I was not able to re-ignite the Kantian part of my brain again until 1976, when I took a graduate seminar on the Transcendental Deduction with Professor Dieter Henrich, who was visiting at Harvard from the University of Heidelberg. We had wonderful, heated but good-natured disagreements, which often devolved into simply firing passage citations back and forth at each other: I was a fan of the Transcendental Deduction in A, whereas he had just published a very important book on the Transcendental Deduction in B.<sup>6</sup> At his invitation, I spent the following year and a half—1977-1978—in West Berlin learning German, and in Heidelberg studying Kant and Hegel with him and Michael Theunissen.

Those were turbulent years in German politics. At their center was the University of Heidelberg's Collegium Academicum, the radical left student center and dormitory where I lived, which was targeted for closure by the university administration. I took courses and studied at the

university or participated in protest marches in the Altstadt during the day, ate dinner and drank beer during the evening, and went dancing most of the night. In addition, Professor Henrich organized a Kant reading group for me at his home in the mountains above the Altstadt. There he introduced me to his best graduate students, with whom I continued and deepened the animated discussions of the Transcendental Deduction we had begun in his Harvard seminar. Some have remained friends to this day.

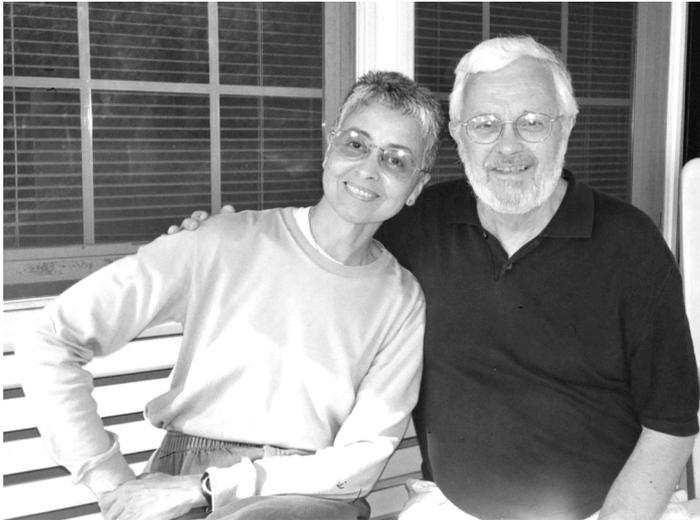
I have never found an acceptable substitute for studying these texts carefully and repeatedly. Kant's most important writings offer the reader a fundamental and incontrovertible experience of immediate reality, namely the reality of absorbing the sentences he actually wrote in order to dissect the necessary preconditions of reading them (difficult though it may be to discern what he meant by them). Particularly the *Critique of Pure Reason* contains a strong *indexical* referent to one's own process of comprehending his assertions. Unlike Descartes' *Meditations*, which positions sensory self-evidence as a first premise on which to build inferential philosophical reasoning, Kant offers analyses of the very cognitive structures one must deploy in order to comprehend them. Thus one can test the accuracy of some of those analyses with reference to one's own experience in unpacking them. There can be no more authoritative measure of the plausibility of a Kant interpretation than that, and Kant-lite readings that purport to interpret Kant's texts yet ignore what he actually says forfeit their claim to that authority. Most of my later work in philosophy has been in contemporary metaethics, but all of it draws on an explicitly Kantian framework in its conceptualization of arguments and theses. And all of it has been nourished by my frequent forays into Kant exegesis over the last half-century. Each such expedition invariably turns up new connections, arguments, and themes I had not noticed on previous readings. I am now in the process of completing the exegetical project, *Kant's Metaethics: First Critique Foundations of His Theory of Action*, through which I hope to bring them into mutual relation.

It was also during those years at university that I began to experience the collisions between academic authority and incontrovertible reality that ultimately determined the course and outcome of my professional trajectory. I did my undergraduate honor's thesis on deception and self-deception, under the supervision of Professors Arthur Collins and Martin Tamny. Professor Collins's own work at that time defended an Empiricist, radically behaviorist, and materialist analysis of mental states as nonexistent, in the tradition of Gilbert Ryle. On this view, there was "no ghost in the machine," to quote Ryle's precept. To me, that metaphor eloquently and tragically expressed the traumatized mental state of men who had survived but not fully recovered from their wartime experiences as themselves expendable cogs in the war machine. Collins's own arguments were more sophisticated, highly crafted, and carefully thought through than Ryle's. I found them harder to refute. Nevertheless, Empiricist behaviorism as a philosophy of mind seemed to me ingenious without being compelling. It satisfied neither the standards of philosophical insight I was learning from the vast majority of texts I was studying, nor the reality of my immediate experience, which most definitely does include mental states. I did my best to demonstrate that, and paid the price. Professor Collins was not pleased.

My instinctive, unyielding resistance to adopting the tenets of behaviorism and materialism as my own laid the groundwork for further conflicts with academic authority, in graduate school and thereafter. Quine gave me a public tongue-lashing and an A-minus in his philosophy of language seminar for questioning his reliance on it. Rawls, with whom I did my dissertation, expressed in many ways his displeasure with my interrogation of the behaviorist, revealed-preference microeconomic foundations on which his theory of justice was based. He withdrew his professional support after I resisted his pressure to write an historical dissertation on Hume. Yet he also had possessed the generosity of spirit to recognize me as a theory-builder like himself, and to give me excellent advice on how to build mine, almost despite himself, and without any prompting from me. I always knew when he was about to volunteer suggestions or references I could use, because he would look away, lower his head, blush, and mumble almost

inaudibly, as though he were embarrassed to be caught backing the opposing team. He usually didn't mention them until I had already packed up my books and notes and was halfway out the door. With his help, I began to learn the history of neoclassical economics and to study basic decision theory and social choice theory in his graduate seminars and tutorials.

In addition to his recommended further readings, I was also extremely fortunate to develop a lasting friendship with Edward McClennen, a close associate of Rawls's who was devoted to those formal methods in his own work and very encouraging of them as they appeared in mine. He was unique among the senior philosophers in the Humean camp with



The author and Ned McClennen, 2004. Photo credit: Ellen Esrock

whom I talked in depth, in that he did not react to our philosophical disagreements as personal attacks. His own, groundbreaking contributions to decision theory were very substantial and highly influential. He knew the limitations of the field, as well as the breadth and depth of its literature, well enough not to feel threatened by the critique and emendations to it I was proposing.

In my first job, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, I encountered an entire department teeming with

Humean behaviorists who—as one later confided to me—had decided to hire me because they felt sure they needed merely to “work [me] over,” i.e. knock the Kantian stuffing out of me, in order to set me on the right philosophical path. That project did not succeed, because their attempts to refute my critiques of the Humean conception of rational agency too often degenerated into shouting matches and personal attacks before they had attained the requisite level of plausibility. They prepared for my tenure review by consulting a university lawyer as to how to credibly deny it without incurring a lawsuit, then wrote up an annual evaluation of my work as “incoherent,” “inadequate,” and “defective,” and of me as “baffling,” “frustrating,” and “unresponsive,” but “poised” (to do what? I wondered).

But it didn't end there. My second job, a tenured associate professorship at Georgetown University, was the first of three out of the six universities at which I taught that included a substantial proportion of non-Humean faculty. Most of the non-Humeans identified themselves—wrongly, in my opinion—as situated outside the tradition of Anglo-American analytic philosophy, and me—rightly—as situated within it. My new colleagues sorted themselves into analytic versus continental alliances, which didn't fit the players (the Catholic theologians and the department's Hegel expert authored the most precise and detailed analyses) and didn't fit me—an asset, until I needed allies myself. To the self-identified continentalists, I was the analytic enemy in Kantian clothing; whereas to the Humeans, I was the Kantian enemy in analytic clothing. Something for everyone, so to speak. A colleague who did ordinary language analyses of emotional states simply stared at me, speechless, eyes widened in shock, at my timid suggestion that not all mental terms could possibly have exclusively behavioral denotations. I felt the room temperature drop several degrees. A junior colleague whom I had helped negotiate a two-two teaching load clicked his heels and gave me the Hitler salute as he passed me in the hallway. Of the three ideologically diverse departments in which I taught, none were more welcoming of my philosophical work than the Humeans at Michigan had been. I recall a particularly ugly fight at my last job, in which I faced off against *all* of my colleagues, Humeans

and non-Humeans alike, for their decision to abolish the logic requirement for the philosophy major. “Let’s not all shout me down at once,” I joked feebly.

At my third job, at the University of California, San Diego, the department’s alpha male, whose radical materialist analysis of mind had won her official standing as a MacArthur genius, reprimanded me loudly in the department hallway, in front of the graduate students, for interrupting a secretary in the middle of a telephone call to a student. I thought it possible that her anger was displaced. The non-materialists in the department vanished into the background. But one of them subsequently called me into his office to explain that the secretary had assisted Herbert Marcuse, which entitled her to special deference.

There definitely were other issues contributing to these reactions. Those were the years in which my visibility as an artist had started to exceed my ability to keep my “double life” a secret. I make Conceptual art, the cheapest kind of contemporary art there is (in order to make serious money, you have to be a painter). So I got famous without getting rich. I began to need help in managing and sustaining my output and professional obligations in both fields. I repeatedly sought this help from my academic employers. Most of the institutions at which I taught were officially welcoming of my “two-for-the-price-of-one” professional achievements. But none were willing to offer concrete accommodations for them, of the sort enjoyed by other hyperproductive, high-visibility colleagues whose work spanned more than one discipline (administrative assistance, course reductions, and the like). I suppose they reasoned that if I could not earn enough making Conceptual art, I should turn to painting. My gender and erstwhile racial self-identification as African American<sup>7</sup> also may have increased their reluctance and magnified their image of me as a presumptuous prima donna.

So perhaps my colleagues’ antagonism to my ideologically deviant philosophical work was simply the last straw. Perhaps they thought that the least I could offer, in return for countenancing my uncustomary pleas for multi-disciplinary support, would be to cooperate with their philosophical agenda. As those bargaining terms never occurred to me, I was always surprised by their angry reactions to my critiques, which generally strove to be careful, well researched, and respectful of the views under scrutiny. As the reactions themselves were not, I simply could not bring myself to defer to them, no matter how vehement or menacing they became. Because my prior philosophical experience in my family, high school, art school, and college had included no primer for interpreting hostile philosophical reactions as potential threats to my professional survival, I did not recognize them as such when they arrived.

Instead I felt flattered at being taken so seriously (the decibel level attested to that), and grateful for the tremendous amount I learned from doing battle with these high-powered philosophical intellects who declined to pull their punches. I emerged from these encounters with a greatly enlarged knowledge base of arguments, articles, books, and conference papers they had rightly insisted I address. Virtually all of those relied on Humean and Utilitarian strategies of argumentation, buttressed by the formal resources of Ramsey-Savage decision theory, with the aim of anchoring their philosophical claims in a rigorous methodology that had robust empirical application. I recognized the value and importance of that approach from my work with Rawls, and so proceeded to learn that body of research as well.

The more I studied this material, the more my admiration for its achievements grew. My quite severe reservations could not obscure the fact that the Humean approach to the analysis, explanation, and prediction of human behavior, including human moral behavior, is an extremely powerful and impressive system, collaboratively constructed and elaborated over centuries, with painstaking care and dedication, by world-renowned adherents in the social sciences as well as the humanities. It is easy to see why they justifiably felt that *something like* this view had to be right—not least of all because it had no serious competitors. I was also envious of the sophisticated scholarship and detailed formal work that had contributed to such a compelling and highly developed worldview. And I joined the protective sentiment that work this significant was in any case to be preserved rather than discarded.

My growing ambition to supply a comparably detailed, rigorous, and comprehensive methodological foundation for a Kantian metaethical view did in fact preserve the core of the Humean achievement. Yet I saw no reason why that achievement could not be equaled or even surpassed by properly developing and amplifying the rudimentary decision procedure Kant had supplied in the *Groundwork*. It seemed to me that Kant's procedure had no less potential for explaining, predicting, and motivating actual human behavior than Hume's had demonstrated, once the foundations of that procedure in the first *Critique* had been exposed, acknowledged, and properly integrated into it. Indeed I felt certain that the Humean view could be successfully incorporated into such a suitably elaborated Kantian model, just as Kant had incorporated Hume's analysis into his own—to the mutual benefit of both camps. All that was needed were a few significant revisions to the conceptual apparatus of each, together with the freedom to poach from each for the benefit of the other where convenient. These two standpoints were not actually in competition, but rather complementary. Each supplied important infrastructure lacking in the other. My two-volume project, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*,<sup>8</sup> was motivated by these reactions to the philosophical conflicts that repeatedly confronted me.

However, although all of these confrontations were very edifying philosophically, they were also extremely stressful personally, and the stress intensified. The pattern was almost always the same: where my colleagues failed through rational philosophical dialogue to secure my acquiescence with the prevailing ideological view, the most professionally dominant would incite the group to non-philosophical measures that gradually edged me out of the profession. This pattern held even in the area of Kant scholarship, where the existence of mental states was for the most part not in dispute. But the importance of consulting the text definitely was. Some of my former graduate school classmates, all highly regarded Kant-lite exegetes, tried first to dissuade me from contributing a heavily exegetical, first *Critique*-based essay to the Rawls Festschrift in moral philosophy they were editing, because, they explained, I would be unable to defend my view; then, after reading it, tried to censor it from the volume entirely, on the grounds that it went “against the grain of received interpretation of Kant.” These colleagues were not unusual in interpreting my resistance to their philosophical ideology as an insult to their professional authority. I now think that in that particular case, they perceived correctly.<sup>9</sup> My obstinate insistence on publishing that essay with its detailed attention to the text intact has had adverse and retaliatory professional repercussions ever since. When the essay finally appeared in print, Rawls expressed both gratitude and also surprise that a student of his could have produced such a detailed exegesis of Kant.

The more I persisted in my work, the more those hostile pressures multiplied and ramified throughout my professional relationships. In 1978, during graduate school, I had published my term paper for Rawls's Social and Political Philosophy course in *Ethics*.<sup>10</sup> After that debut, and despite Rawls's unenthusiastic letter of recommendation, I received eighteen job offers and accepted a tenure-track assistant professorship at a top-three department that at that time was widely considered to be the best job in the country. My papers were accepted, and invited, by the most highly regarded journals in the field. The longer I persevered in my chosen research program, and the more widely my race and gender identity became known, the fewer such welcoming responses I received. By the time I was stripped of my tenured full professorship at Wellesley College in May 2008, four of the eight philosophy journals to which I had subscribed since college had summarily discontinued my subscriptions, and two more have been discontinued since then. None of these acknowledged receipt of my paper submissions, much less accepted them for publication. But by then I had stopped submitting papers to them in any case. And there were virtually no individuals, institutions, or organizations in the field of philosophy, most of which were now managed and staffed by colleagues I had gotten to know in graduate school, with whom I still maintained active collegial relationships.

But that was partly my doing. I voluntarily discontinued several of them myself, in order to avoid treatment that I found offensive but that my colleagues found perfectly legitimate and

appropriate to my diminished professional status.<sup>11</sup> For example, I declined a younger scholar's conditional invitation to write an essay, provided that it was outside my area of specialization, for a collection he was editing. He explained that someone else had already been invited to write in my research area. He expressed surprise at my refusal. And in 2013 I canceled my American Philosophical Association membership, after its executive director informed me that she was "taking the liberty" of deleting my name from the APA general mailing list, in response to my request to receive no further solicitations for donations to its "Diversity and Inclusiveness Initiatives." I regarded those solicitations to a woman of acknowledged African descent who had just been kicked out of the field as insulting, and being peremptorily dropped from the general mailing list even more so. I was not motivated to explain why.

The incidents I describe here are only a small sampling of those I experienced,<sup>12</sup> all of which broadcasted the same ideological message: either shut up and fit in, or get out. But this message is old news. Wielding professional stature as a weapon to enforce philosophical obedience is not unusual in academic philosophy, and sometimes it is justified on pedagogical grounds: as a matter of policy, I marked down or failed students who violated my *Ten Commandments of Philosophical Writing*.<sup>13</sup> But the pressures on philosophical faculty to ideological conformity, irrespective of methodological or stylistic issues, are strong and pervasive, and I am by no means their only target. They are exerted most systematically by those who have the most to lose from open critical interrogation of their views, on those who have the most to gain by insisting on it. I doubt that any reader of this essay has not at some time been on the receiving end of those pressures, including those who learn from that experience how to exert them on others. I believe it is better to document and discuss such incidents openly than to suppress them, so as to contribute to a reality-based understanding of the kind and quality of intellectual compromise professional survival in academic philosophy sometimes requires. No one should have to learn it the hard way, piecemeal, as I did. By that point it is often too late to extricate oneself.

I saw no way to acquiesce to those pressures without sacrificing the connections between what I perceive, what I know, what I think, and what I say. To cave in to my colleagues' very unphilosophical attempts to force me to assert and defend what I knew to be false in order to secure my position in the field would have been completely out of the question. By now it is no longer possible for me to feel even mild regret at having laid bare, through my intransigence, the rift between the discipline of philosophy to which I was and remain unconditionally committed, and the inimical priorities of the profession of philosophy that I repeatedly rejected. I consider myself to be extremely fortunate to have discovered, nurtured, and protected from disillusionment my connection to the invaluable core of philosophical dialectic that my parents transmitted to me in childhood.<sup>14</sup> My decision, reiterated at each point at which I was offered the choice, to sacrifice my professional relationships, my standing, and my future in the field in order to protect the integrity and quality of my work was the right one for me.

I self-published the first edition of *Rationality and the Structure of the Self* online in July 2008, two months after I had been forced out of the field. Since then, it has been very widely read, circulated, and appropriated without citation. Private and anonymous comments on it have been enthusiastic and supportive. But breaking the public silence took over a decade. It was not until October 2018 that it was openly discussed for the first time—very favorably, in an online symposium hosted by *Critique*, the international online platform for discussing new books on Kant and German Idealism, by Professors Paul Guyer and Richard Bradley, the two most highly regarded philosophers in their areas of specialization (Kant scholarship and decision theory respectively). According to the editors, attention to this discussion has been sustained and voluminous ever since.<sup>15</sup>

What exactly was all the fuss about? The first part of *Rationality and the Structure of the Self—Volume I: The Humean Conception*—consists entirely of detailed analysis and critique of all of the most important contemporary and historical Empiricist and behaviorist views and arguments

to which I was exposed during these decades. The second part—*Volume II: A Kantian Conception*—offers an original contemporary alternative based in the insights and argumentative strategies I mined from Kant’s texts, particularly the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Both volumes are open access and freely available online at <http://adrianpiper.com/rss/index.shtml>, so anyone can read them whenever they like and form their own opinion.

I worked on this project for thirty-four years. My repeated clashes over those decades with some of the very best minds in the field demonstrated to me several times over that my views could withstand and greatly profit from their rational criticism. So it may seem possible that the reception of *Rationality and the Structure of the Self* among my colleagues, and therefore my path in the profession, would have been easier, had certain counterfactual conditions been satisfied. Had I not insistently, repeatedly, and with increasing vehemence corrected my colleagues’ obstinate and tenacious assumption that I was “white”<sup>16</sup> (thereby, you see, implicitly mocking them by trying to pass for “black”), they might have been more inclined to accord me the collegial treatment they reserved for self-styled “white” women. Most of the rest of my family, on both sides, have been passing for white for generations, and they are doing extremely well. Even better, had I been racialized and gendered as a “white” male, they might have presumed my group membership rather than requiring me at each step to prove it. The above-mentioned members of my family who have been thus identified are doing particularly well. In all likelihood, my philosophical output would have encountered a friendlier and more collegial reception had either of these conditions been met.

However, in neither of these counterfactual cases would I have produced the work I actually did produce. It would have lacked the rigor, precision, and breadth it achieved, because there would have been no posse of vigilant academic gatekeepers to challenge my right to every thesis, every argument, every sentence I asserted. Easy acceptance would have meant no competitive arena in which to repeatedly stress-test the resilience of my views, or to develop confidence in my ability to defend them against the Humeans’ reflexive disparagement.

Even worse, there would have been no need to. I would have lacked the distanced vantage point from which even to formulate my objections to the prevailing view, and propose solutions to its defects. I would not even have seen those defects. I could not have afforded to. I could have fit in only if my philosophical views had also fit in, and they could have fit in only if I, like all of my colleagues, had ignored the pressing foundational questions that lured me off the straight and narrow path to professional success in the first place. Hence those views would have been as much in need of critique as those to which I in fact devoted my scrutiny. So my gratitude to all of those colleagues whose opposition forced me to surpass my own conception of the quality of work of which I believed myself capable is *real*, it is *deep*, and it is *lasting*.

Surviving this forty-year-long gauntlet without the anchor and steadying compass of my yoga practice would have been impossible. Throughout those decades, I had supplemented that practice with frequent hatha yoga classes, Vedic reading groups, teacher training courses and seminars, and personal relationships with monks and nuns in the Advaita Vedānta monastic tradition. In 2004, I did a life-saving retreat at the Sarada Convent in southern California. And in early 2007, I was privileged to spend two weeks at the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur Math, Kolkata, during the festivities for Swami Vivekananda’s 144<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration.

And when, in my last teaching job, the threats to my psychological and emotional wellbeing escalated into threats to my physical safety, my first line of defense had been to encircle and fortify my life with even more of those resources—by teaching them to my students. In the spring of 2000, while suing Wellesley College for fraud, breach of contract, loss of reputation, discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, I offered for the first time a mid-level course entitled *Vedānta Ethics and Epistemology*. In the spring of 2004, while fighting the College’s attempts to obstruct my recovery from two surgeries and the philosophy department’s second attempt to cancel my annual Kant seminar, and while arranging secretly to leave the country, I

introduced to my students a second mid-level course, *The Philosophy of Yoga*. Sharing the Vedic texts with these students reinforced the spiritual armor that was serving me so well every day. Introducing them to the practices of meditation and hatha yoga further cemented the importance of those practices in my own life. Because of their content, these two courses in effect created a small, transient, supportive community based on Vedic principles of awareness, insight, and peace. I taught *Vedanta Ethics and Epistemology* for the last time in the spring of 2005, during my last semester before leaving the United States, and academia, permanently. But I did not leave the discipline of philosophy and I never will.

You can drive the grrrl out of philosophy,  
but you can't drive philosophy out of the grrrl.  
;D

**Adrian M. S. Piper** (b. 1948; BA in Philosophy and minor in Medieval and Renaissance Musicology, CCNY, 1974; graduate studies, University of Heidelberg, 1977-78; PhD in Philosophy, Harvard University, 1981) taught philosophy full-time for 30 years at Georgetown, Harvard, Michigan, Stanford, University of California San Diego, and Wellesley. In 1987 at Georgetown she became the first tenured African American woman professor in the field of philosophy. For her refusal to return to the USA while listed as a Suspicious Traveler on the U.S. Transportation Security Administration Watch List, Wellesley College forcibly terminated her tenured full professorship in philosophy in 2008. In 2011 the American Philosophical Association promoted her to Professor Emeritus. Her philosophy awards include a Non-Resident Fellowship at the New York Institute for the Humanities at New York University, a Scholarship at the Getty Research Institute; and National Endowment for the Humanities, Andrew Mellon, Woodrow Wilson, Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, and Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin Institute for Advanced Study Research Fellowships. Piper's principal philosophical publications are in metaethics, Kant, and the history of ethics. Her two-volume study in Kantian metaethics, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume I: The Humean Conception* and *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume II: A Kantian Conception*, was accepted for publication by Cambridge University Press in 2008 (second edition 2013) and has been available since then as an open access e-book at <http://adrianpiper.com/rss/index.shtml>. She lives and works in Berlin. Piper is also an artist.

<sup>1</sup> Collected in Adrian Piper, *OUT OF ORDER, OUT OF SIGHT, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 19-23.

<sup>2</sup> Śaṅkara's commentary on Vyāsa's Brahma Sūtra would be a good example of the way Socrates's analytical and dialectical method is mirrored in this tradition. See *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993 [fifth edition]).

<sup>3</sup> At that time, I was only one of several CCNY undergraduate philosophy majors being groomed for graduate school. Contemporaneous classmates were accepted at Princeton, Pittsburgh, MIT, and Cornell around the same time I was accepted at Harvard. Not for nothing was CCNY known as "the Harvard of the proletariat."

<sup>4</sup> G. E. Hughes and M. J. Cresswell, *An Introduction to Modal Logic* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968).

<sup>5</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971 [first edition]).

<sup>6</sup> Dieter Henrich, *Identität und Objektivität. Eine Untersuchung über Kants transzendente Deduktion* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Universität, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> I publicly retired from being black in September 2012. See my *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, A Moment of Embarrassment*, 2012. Digital image. 7" x 6.86" (19.97 x 15.24 cm). Collection Adrian

- Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin. © APRA Foundation Berlin, at [http://www.adrianpiper.com/news\\_sep\\_2012.shtml](http://www.adrianpiper.com/news_sep_2012.shtml).
- 8 Adrian Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self, Volume I: The Humean Conception*; and *Volume II: A Kantian Conception* (Berlin: APRA Foundation Berlin, 2013 [second edition; first edition 2008]). <http://adrianpiper.com/rss/index.shtml>.
- 9 My diminished opinion of these colleagues is most aptly expressed by Edward Gibbon's judgment about Julian the Apostate, that "it is unworthy of a philosopher to wish that any opinions and arguments the most repugnant to his own should be concealed from the knowledge of mankind" (Womersley 2005: 880, footnote 38). See Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume II (1781), ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin Classics, 2005).
- 10 "Utility, Publicity, and Manipulation," *Ethics* 88, no. 3, (Apr. 1978): 189-206. Pre-dissertation publication in highly ranked philosophy journals is now practically *de rigueur* for graduate students who want to get a job. But in those days, it was very unusual; so much so that John Cooper, now at Princeton, asked me in a job interview why I had done it. I replied that I wanted to ascertain whether or not I belonged in the field.
- 11 I have narrated this trajectory in some depth in *Escape to Berlin: A Travel Memoir/ Flucht nach Berlin: Eine Reiseerinnerung* (Berlin: APRA Foundation Berlin, 2018). <https://www.centralbooks.com/escape-to-berlin-a-travel-memoir.html>
- 12 Some others I have deemed fit to print can be found in "Flying," (*Piper 1996*: 223-32), "Passing for White, Passing for Black" (*Piper 1996*, 275-307; also available at <http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/Passing.pdf>); "On Wearing Three Hats," 1996; in *Multitasking–Synchronität als kulturelle Praxis*, (catalogue to accompany exhibition at Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (NGBK), Berlin: NGBK, 2007, pp. 117-27; available at <http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/WebsiteNGBK3Hats.pdf>); "General Introduction to the Project" and "Preface to the Second Edition," in Piper (2013); and throughout Piper (2018).
- 13 Adrian M. S. Piper, "Ten Commandments of Philosophical Writing," 1992. <http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/10CommsPhilWriting.pdf>
- 14 I have often tried to reconstruct my parents' reasoning in not teaching me the survival tactic of diplomatically deferring or genuflecting to abuses of institutional authority. Mom, Dad, what were you thinking? I've wondered. Were they convinced that I would never need to? Or preparing me to be mistaken for "white"? The best hypothesis I can come up with is that they did not teach me this tactic because their parents had not taught it to them. Had my father been an academic rather than a lawyer, perhaps he would have learned and transmitted it.
- 15 Their comments and my reply are collected at [http://www.adrianpiper.com/news.shtml#October\\_2018](http://www.adrianpiper.com/news.shtml#October_2018).
- 16 For my use of scare-quotes around this and related terms, see my "Passing for White, Passing for Black," *Transition* 58 (1992): 4-32; reprinted Piper (1996). Also available at <http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/Passing.pdf>; "Df. Racial Essentialism," 2019. <http://www.adrianpiper.com/racial-essentialism.shtml>; and Piper (2018).